

Describing and Managing Collections Guide

Introduction

The focus of this guide is to ensure that all of your audio and video tapes can be searchable and physically organized. Searchable means being able to identify and locate media from your collection that contains desired information by using the metadata that describes them. Physically organized means that the storage location of your items is established and tracked.

This guide will help you to answer the following questions:

- How will you uniquely identify and differentiate items from one another?
- How will you manage your items and retrieve them in a consistent manner?
- How will you describe your items, as well as capture critical information that explains them (such as the context of their creation)?

This guide also provides a spreadsheet that will allow you to capture the metadata you need to describe and physically manage your audio and video tapes. This will also give you the potential to migrate this metadata to established descriptive systems and databases in the future should your community desire to do so.

Preparing for the description and management of collections

Before beginning to assign unique identifiers and using the *Collections Management Spreadsheet* to capture descriptions of your audio and video tapes, please review the [Inventory Guide](#). If you have followed the guide to create an inventory (or have independently created something comparable), you are ready to proceed.

This guide provides a number of options for unique identifiers and sub-collection identifiers, as well as a number of optional elements in the [Collections Management Spreadsheet](#). It is recommended that you capture your decisions in a policy document (and accompanying procedures/workflow documents) to guide future work.

Unique identifiers, collections, and sub-collections

What is meant by a unique identifier?

A **unique identifier** is a number or code that is unique within your collection. A **unique identifier** may be applied to an item (uniquely distinguishing one audio or video tape from every other audio or video tape in your collection) or to a group of items (indicating that an audio or video tape belongs with a group and distinguishing one group from every other group).

There are many different combinations of letters and numbers that may be used for unique identifiers. What your unique identifiers should look like depends on a few factors:

- the size and complexity of your **collection**
- the amount of time and resources you have available to process the media items
- whether or not **sub-collections** are present and identifiable
- whether or not you intend to accept donations of materials

What is meant by collection and sub-collections?

Collection is a term that has different meanings in different contexts. For example, it has different meanings in the context of a museum, an archives, or a library.

For the purposes of this guide, we will define your **collection** as all of the items in your custody and control.

We will define **sub-collections** as a group of materials (which could include papers, audio cassettes, video recordings, etc.) that share a common origin—that is, they were made, received, or maintained by the same person, organization, or family. See “[Appendix C](#)” in the [Appendices](#) for more details.

Let’s take a look at a few of the options for how you may uniquely identify your media items.

You may find that some of your materials already have identifiers associated with them. It is perfectly acceptable to continue to use existing identifiers, provided that they are unique (not duplicated elsewhere in your collection), systematic (they follow a consistent approach), not too long (for file naming), and do not include disallowed characters (see the [Digital Media File Naming Guide](#))

Option 1: Simple unique identifiers (no sub-collections component)

A simple approach to **unique identifiers** may be appropriate for your organization if:

- You have a small number of media items in your collection.
- You have limited time and/or resources to process media items.
- You don’t have contextual information about your media items (e.g., unlabeled audio or video tapes; incomplete information about their creation, how they came to be in your collection, and/or how items in your collection may be related).
- You do not have plans to accept donations of materials.

If you do not have the time or contextual documentation to create sub-collections, having no sub-collections is better than creating random sub-collections. Even if you decide not to include sub-collection identifiers, try to capture as much information as you can about how the media items were created, how they came to be in your collection, and how they may be

related to other records. You may use the “Notes” field of the **Collections Management Spreadsheet** (Items tab) for this.

This simple method of creating unique identifiers for analogue media involves using a media prefix (e.g., **cc** for compact cassette, the proper name for standard audio cassettes), a sequential number (**001, 002, 003**), and a part number (**-1, -2, -3**).

Example: **cc001-1**

Media prefix	Sequential number	Part number
cc	001	-1



For example, let’s say that you have audio cassette recordings of six meetings in your collection, totaling 10 cassettes (as some meetings require multiple cassettes to record them in their entirety). Their unique identifiers would be the media prefix for audio cassettes (**cc**), their sequential number (**001 to 006**, one sequential number for each meeting), and the part number (counting the number of cassettes for each meeting):

Unique identifier	Content
cc001-1	1988-01-07 Chief and Council Meeting
cc002-1	1988-01-14 Chief and Council Meeting

cc003-1	1988-01-21 Chief and Council Meeting (1 of 2)
cc003-2	1988-01-21 Chief and Council Meeting (2 of 2)
cc004-1	1988-01-23 General Band Meeting (1 of 3)
cc004-2	1988-01-23 General Band Meeting (2 of 3)
cc004-3	1988-01-23 General Band Meeting (3 of 3)
cc005-1	1988-01-25 Fisheries Department Meeting
cc006-1	1988-01-28 Chief and Council Meeting (1 of 2)
cc006-2	1988-01-28 Chief and Council Meeting (2 of 2)

If an audio cassette related to these meetings is subsequently discovered or added to your collection it can easily be assigned an identifier. A cassette related to an existing date would be assigned the next part number. A cassette related to another recording date would be assigned the next available sequential number. If it is not clear whether a particular cassette is related to others, it should receive its own unique identifier.

Be sure to use a sequential number with enough digits to accommodate the number of recordings in your collection, as well as leaving room for future growth. For example, three digits (cc###-#) would be able to accommodate up to 999 unique recordings on audio cassettes (note: as in the example above some recordings will have multiple tapes). See [Digital Media File Naming Guide](#) for more information about leading zeros.

Similarly, use a part number with enough digits to accommodate the number of parts. If you have a recording that is composed of 10 or more tapes, use two digits (cc###-##).

Media prefixes

The following are examples of media prefixes you may use. Feel free to change them as needed. For example, if “cc” is already a commonly used abbreviation for “Chief and Council” in your organization, you may want to use “ac” instead to avoid confusion.

Media type	Media prefix	Example identifier
audio cassettes (compact cassette)	cc	cc001-1
open reel audio (reel to reel)	rr	rr001-1
VHS	vhs	vhs001-1
VHS-C	vhsc	vhsc001-1
Betamax	bmx	bmx001-1
Micro cassette	mc	mc001-1
MiniDisc	md	md001-1
Video8/Hi8/Digital8	8mm	8mm001-1

Part numbers

Indigitization recommends that you include part numbers in your unique identifiers. A part number used in this way becomes part of the unique identifier, and all unique identifiers should

include a part number. Even when only one piece of media is needed to completely contain the content, include a -1.

Option 2: Unique identifiers with sub-collections

An approach to unique identifiers that includes sub-collections may be appropriate for your organization if:

- You have a large number of media items in your collection.
- You accept donations of materials or plan to accept donations of materials.
- Your collection contains multiple groups of records that were created or received by different people, organizations, or families.

Our first objective in this method is to create sub-collection identifiers. Everything made or received by the same “creator” will be assigned the same sub-collection identifier so that they are not mixed with records or media that were made or received by other creators.

The following are two options for sub-collection identifiers.

Option 2a: Simple sub-collection identifiers

If your collection will not contain a large number of sub-collections or donations, a simple sub-collection identifier can be used. A letter to denote the sub-collection (e.g., **c**) followed by a sequential number is fine for these purposes. Again, be sure to include an appropriate number of leading zeros.

Sub-collection identifier	Creator
c001	[Community name] Band Administration sub-collection
c002	[Band Member Name] sub-collection
...	...
c025	[Band Member Organization] sub-collection

Option 2b: Complex sub-collection identifiers

If your collection has a large number of sub-collections and you anticipate receiving a large number of donations each year, you may decide to use a slightly more complex identifier. One common system of identifying sub-collections uses the following components:

1. A prefix: This can be anything, such as an abbreviation for your organization’s name or the division you are working in. For example, **A** (for archives).
2. The current year: This may be the year the sub-collection was received as a donation, or in the case of boxes that have been sitting around in your storage area for some time, the year that they were identified for processing. For example, **2021**.
3. A sequential number: **01**, **02**, **03**, and so on. The sequential number resets each year.

Year: **2021**

Sub-collection identifier	Creator
A2021-01	[Community name] Band Administration sub-collection

A2021-02	[Band Member Name] sub-collection
...	...

Year: **2022**

Sub-collection identifier	Creator
A2022-01	[Band Member Name] sub-collection
A2022-02	[Band Member Organization] sub-collection
...	...

Identifying items with sub-collection identifiers

This method for uniquely identifying items includes a sub-collection identifier, followed by a media prefix, a sequential number, and a part number.

Example: **A2021-01-cc01-1**

Sub-collection ID	Media prefix	Sequential number	Part number
A2021-01	cc	01	1



You will notice that the media prefix, sequential number, and part number are very similar to what was seen in option 1 (unique identifiers with no sub-collections). The difference is that for

option 1 we need to have enough digits in our sequential number to accommodate all of the different recordings on one media type in our collection. When using sub-collection identifiers, the sequential count for each recording will reset for each different sub-collection, so generally you do not need as many digits in the sequential number.

In option 1 of the example below, we use a three-digit sequential number to accommodate up to 999 different recordings on VHS tapes in our collection (the number of tapes for each recording being captured by the part number). For option 2, assuming that you only need to accommodate up to 99 recordings in each sub-collection, a two-digit sequential number can be used. If a sub-collection is expected to contain 100 or more recordings on VHS, you would increase the number of digits in the sequential number to three digits.

Note how the sequential number resets with each new sub-collection.

Option 1: No sub-collection identifiers	Option 2: Including Sub-collection Identifiers
vhs001-1	c001-vhs01-1
vhs002-1	c001-vhs02-1
vhs003-1	c001-vhs03-1
vhs004-1	c002-vhs01-1
vhs005-1	c002-vhs02-1
vhs006-1	c003-vhs01-1
vhs007-1	c004-vhs01-1

Let's take a look at what our unique identifiers will look like using this method in a few different situations. For an example with a sub-collection identifier of A2021-01, containing eight audio cassettes and three VHS tapes, our unique identifiers could be:

Audio cassette unique identifiers
A2021-01-cc01-1
A2021-01-cc02-1
A2021-01-cc03-1
A2021-01-cc04-1
A2021-01-cc05-1
A2021-01-cc05-2
A2021-01-cc06-1
A2021-01-cc06-2

VHS tape unique identifiers
A2021-01-vhs01-1
A2021-01-vhs02-1
A2021-01-vhs03-1

Similarly, if you were using the simple sub-collection identifiers (c001) for the same example group of eight audio cassettes and three VHS tapes:

Audio cassette unique identifiers
c001-cc01-1
c001-cc02-1
c001-cc03-1
c001-cc04-1

VHS tape unique identifiers
c001-vhs01-1
c001-vhs02-1
c001-vhs03-1

c001-cc05-1
c001-cc05-2
c001-cc06-1
c001-cc06-2

If the next sub-collection (c002) contained three audio cassettes and three open reels:

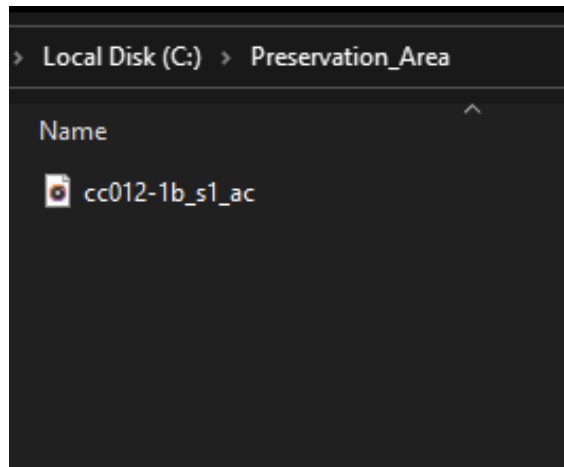
Audio cassette unique identifiers
c002-cc01-1
c002-cc02-1
c002-cc03-1

Open reel unique identifiers
c002-rr01-1
c002-rr02-1
c002-rr03-1

File naming conventions

You may be wondering, what is the difference between a unique identifier and a file name? Are they the same thing?

A unique identifier forms a part of your naming conventions, but there are other elements that are needed to complete the file name. Let's take an example where the unique identifier is **cc012-1**.



As you can see, while the file name includes the unique identifier, it also includes other file metadata: in this case, it includes the side of the tape (b), the signal number (s1), and “ac” representing that the file is an access copy. The file name may also be followed by an extension (such as .wav or .mp3), but these file extensions are typically populated by your system and do not need to be typed into a file name.

See the [Digital Media File Naming Guide](#) to learn more about file naming.

Assigning and physically applying unique identifiers

Unique identifiers should be assigned to audio and video cassettes once you decide to digitize them. This will typically be after your inventory workflow and just prior to digitization. Use the

Inventory spreadsheet “Permanent Unique Identifier” field to record the identifiers as they are assigned.

Because you are assigning unique identifiers prior to digitization, there are a couple of things to bear in mind: firstly, an audio cassette may turn out to be blank, or the contents taped over with copyrighted music, or may for other reasons turn out to be something that you will not keep. In those cases, that unique identifier is not reassigned. Let’s say that you have three audio cassettes, and you assign them the unique identifiers cc001-1, cc002-1, cc003-1. If cc002-1 ends up being completely blank, you would mark down in the “Appraisal” field of the *Inventory Template* spreadsheet the reasons why the item was not kept and proceed with using the *Collections Management Spreadsheet* to describe cc001-1 and cc003-1. It is fine to have gaps in your unique identifiers like this but be sure that everyone knows this so that an employee in the future isn’t searching for cc002-1 thinking it has been misplaced.

Secondly, if there is limited or no information on the labels, you may not know that two audio cassettes are related (i.e., parts of the same recording) until after you have assigned unique identifiers and digitized them. As a result you may have cc001-1 and cc003-1, but had you known they were related you would have assigned them cc001-1 and cc001-2. Do you go back and change the identifiers? Our recommendation is that you do not, as changing identifiers in the file names, on the labels, and in the spreadsheets is risky. While part numbers are a helpful way of identifying related cassettes, you are also able to determine that cassettes are linked through other metadata, such as their titles, their descriptions, or in the notes field.

Changing a unique identifier after digitization should always be considered a last resort and be approached with caution. An example of where you might consider it is if after digitizing you realize that a recording is part of a different sub-collection. If you do change a unique identifier, check and double-check your identifiers for accuracy in the file names, on the labels, and in your spreadsheets, and be sure to leave notes about the change in the *Inventory Template* spreadsheet in case there are any questions about what happened.

[Call out:] Should I organize my audio and video cassettes prior to assigning unique identifiers?

Some organizations have very small or structured media sub-collections and prefer to organize audio and video cassettes chronologically prior to assigning unique identifiers. Taking an example of a group of audio cassettes capturing Chief and Council meetings, you might organize the cassettes by the date of the meeting and then assign identifiers so that the earliest recording receives the first identifier, and the latest recording receives the last identifier. This allows for easier retrieval as the dates and unique identifiers will be in sequential order. However, know that if you find additional Chief and Council recordings down the road, those items will not be in order, as you will not be able to insert them into the sequential order of the unique identifiers. Organizing the cassettes in this way is not necessary as you will always be able to retrieve them by looking up the unique identifier/location identifier, but it is an option that is available to you if it would be helpful to your organization’s access and use needs.

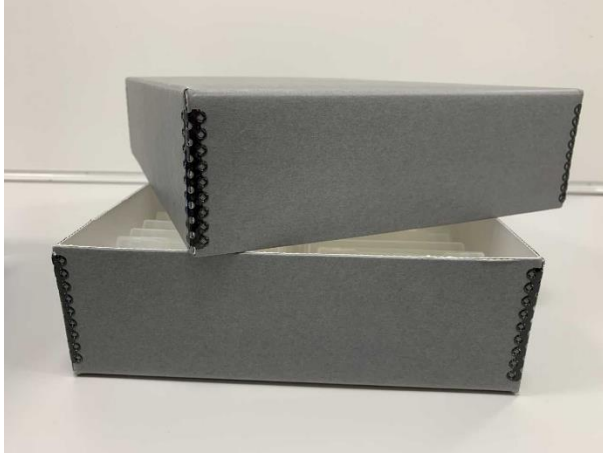
Once you have assigned a permanent unique identifier and recorded it in the inventory spreadsheet (see the [Inventory Guide](#)), the next step is to physically apply the identifier to the media item. If there is no room on the media's existing label to write the identifier, you may write or print it on a normal label (cut to a smaller size if needed) and apply it to the item. Be careful not to cover information on the item's existing label or any mechanical parts required for playback.



An identifier label should also be applied to the spine of the audio or video tape's case.



Some audio and video tapes may need rehousing (i.e., putting the media in a new container) so that they can be stored in a manner that minimizes the likelihood of future damage or slows down the deterioration of the item. For information on preservation and storage strategies, see the [Care and Handling of Magnetic Media Guide](#).



For information on where you can buy containers, boxes, and labels, see the [Digitization Supplies Guide](#).

Physical location identifier

If you have a larger collection that occupies several boxes or shelves, the next thing you will want to do is assign your tapes to a physical storage space.

Location identifiers can either be assigned to a box (e.g., a box of cassettes) or to a tape (e.g., VHS tapes lined up on a shelf).

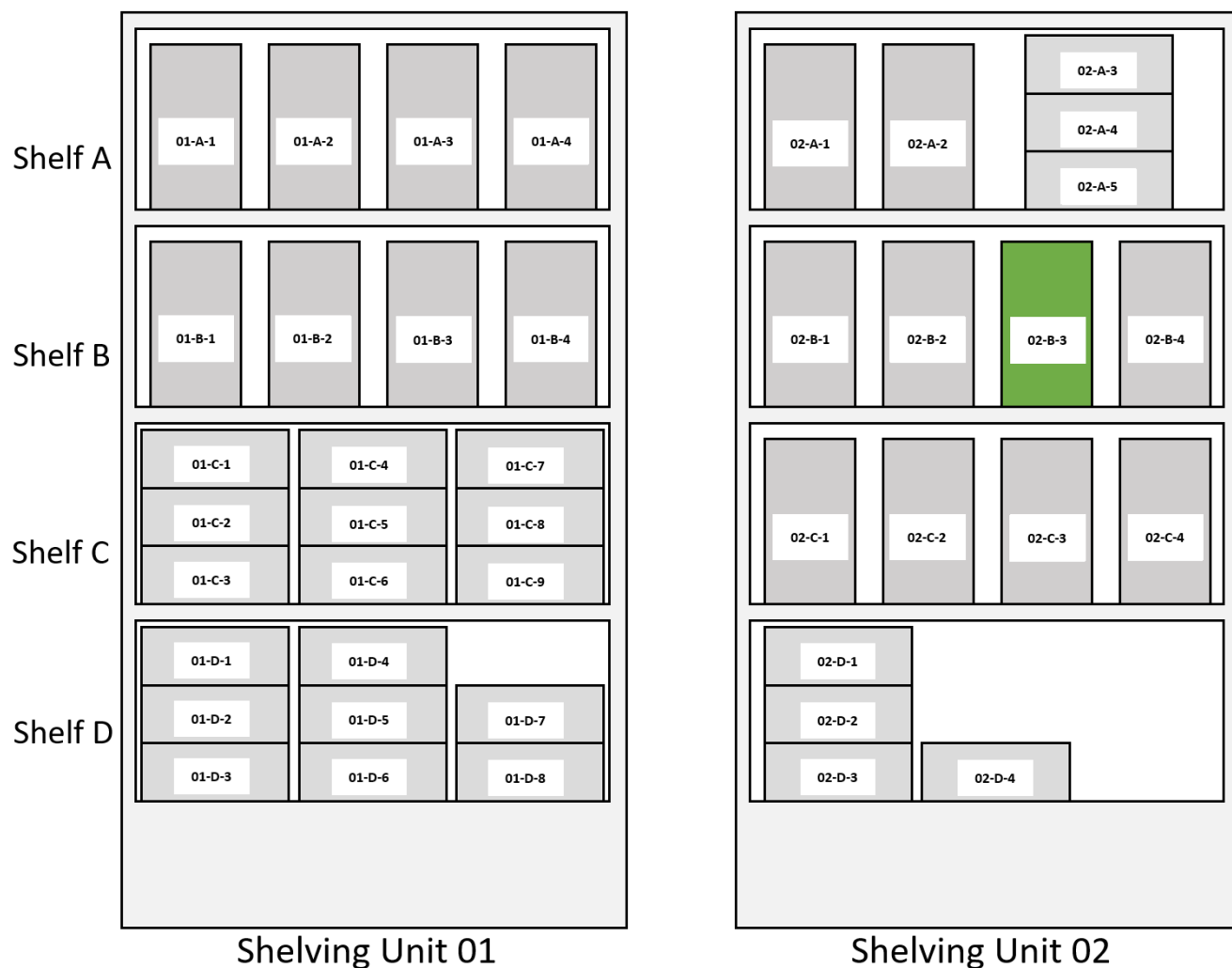


If you do not have location numbers assigned, here is a basic model you can use:

Shelving unit – Shelf letter – Box number (on shelf)

- Shelving unit is a sequential number assigned to each shelving unit.
- Shelf letter is a letter assigned to each shelf in a shelving unit, with A being the top shelf.
- Box number is a sequential number for each box/tape on a single shelf, starting with 1 on the left. (Be sure to use a leading zero if necessary!)

For example, **02-B-3** would be shelving unit number 02, on shelf B, and the third box on the shelf.

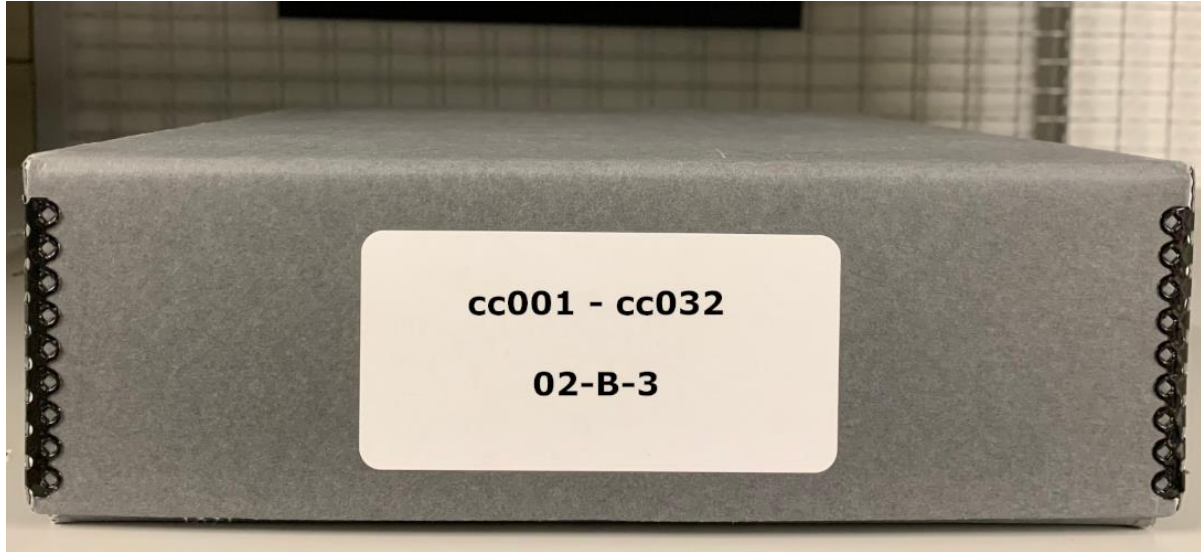


Be sure to label shelving units and shelves clearly.

If you have a small collection, this model may be simplified as needed to suit your needs. For example, if you only have one shelving unit, you may skip the shelving unit number and just start the location identifier with a shelf number. However, it may be helpful to include a shelving unit number in case your collection grows in the future.

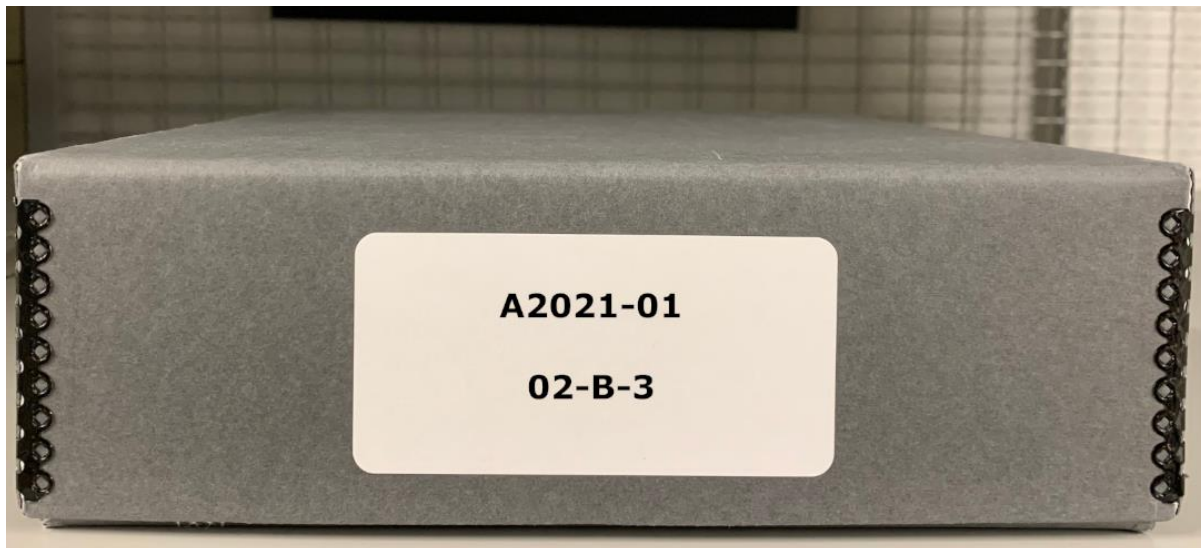
Labelling storage boxes

If you are not using sub-collections, the box label should include the storage identifier and a range of unique identifiers to indicate the contents of a box.

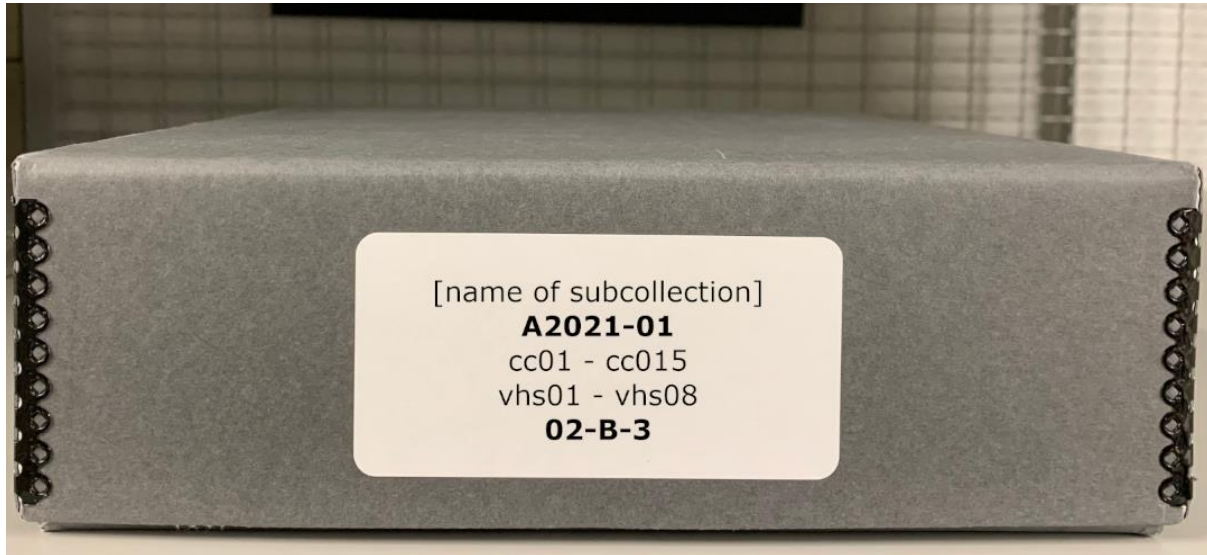


If you are using sub-collections, storage boxes should be labelled with the sub-collection number of their contents and their storage identifier.

If the sub-collection identifier is **A2021-01** and the storage identifier **02-B-3**, you would label the box as follows:



If helpful for retrieval, you may optionally include more details about the contents on the label, as follows:



Be sure to mark the physical location of items in your inventory spreadsheet.

Collections Management Spreadsheet: Overview

The *Collections Management Spreadsheet* has two tabs: one for items and one for sub-collections. This one spreadsheet will be used for all of your items and sub-collections.

Both tabs include field names on the first row and instructions on how to use each field in the second row.

The templates include sample data.

The Items tab of the spreadsheet has 22 fields (11 core fields and 11 optional fields).
The Sub-collections tab of the spreadsheet has 12 fields (8 core fields and 4 optional fields).

You should try to fill out all of the core fields. You may hide optional fields if you are not using them. Your organization may decide whether or not to use them based on your objectives for access and use of the collections.

If there is any information that you would like to track that is not covered by the fields included in the spreadsheet, feel free to add an additional field. Similarly, even the core fields are just recommendations; you may remove fields as you see fit. It is recommended that if you make changes to the metadata structure (that is, the fields), that you document your changes for future reference (in either a policy document, or in a “notes” tab on the Collections Management Spreadsheet).

Collections Management Spreadsheet: Items tab

The Items tab of the *Collections Management Spreadsheet* captures metadata about each audio or video tape.

Please refer to “Appendix A” in the *Appendices* for a full list of the fields and how to fill them out.

Collections Management Spreadsheet: Sub-collections tab

The Sub-collections tab of the *Collections Management Spreadsheet* captures metadata about the overall sub-collection and the context of its creation. If you are not using sub-collections, you do not need to fill out this tab.

Please refer to “Appendix B” in the *Appendices* for a full list of the fields and how to fill them out.

Please also refer to “Appendix C” in the *Appendices* for examples of how sub-collections are defined, and for information on a “Found in [your organization’s name]” sub-collection, which may be useful if the origin of some recordings in your collection are unknown.

Collections Management Spreadsheet: Migrations

It is possible to manage and describe your collection using only this spreadsheet. However, you may find at a certain point of growth that a database would be preferable over a spreadsheet. The metadata schema of this spreadsheet has been designed in a way that it crosswalks to established standards: Mukurtu, ISAD(G), and EAD. Those crosswalks can be found in “Appendix D” in the *Appendices*.